
BOOK REVIEW

Yungjohann, John C. (edited by G. T. Prance, with an epilogue by Yungjohann Hillman). *White Gold, the Diary of a Rubber Cutter in the Amazon 1906–1916*. Synergetic Press, P.O. Box 689, Oracle, Arizona 85623, U.S.A. 1989. Frontispiece + 103 pp., illus., ISBN 0-907791-16-6. Retail price: \$7.95.

Not a diary in the sense of a day-by-day log, *White Gold* is an account of the experiences of New York native John Yungjohann's ill-advised plunge into the upper Amazon as a rubber tapper. Chilleen Prance edited the first-hand text lightly, and augmented it with an introduction that lends perspective. Using a glossary and notes, he defined terms, identified plants and creatures, and clarified obscure points. Numerous black and white photographs taken by Dr. Prance and a map enrich the book.

John Yungjohann made his way up the Amazon and Rio Purus to the mouth of the Rio Xapuri in far-western Brazil. Here a series of surprises began when he was trapped into the purchase of excess supplies at inflated prices and teamed up with six companion tappers and a guide of dubious character. The next surprise was that the work area "a couple of hours" up the river turned out to be 45 days up the river. After teaching the team the basics, the guide disappeared. Before long all seven adventurers were malarial, with the outcome that the hero, himself near death, variously disposed of

the remains of his less fortunate companions. He survived and more or less flourished until beriberi forced him to abandon a subterranean treasure trove of rubber and return to New York, where he resumed his interrupted career as a typesetter.

This is no place to summarize the plot. Suffice it to note that Mr. Yungjohann described rubber tapping, malaria, the experience of being discovered living alone by the local Indians (who turned out to be most hospitable), a system of enslaving rubber tappers through debt, wildlife encounters, and a series of incredible adventures. The book reads like a novel, and there is even a (very brief) romance, in which boy did not get girl.

The only flaw is that the story is intriguing and sketchy at the same time, leaving the reader hungry for more. It is thoroughly pleasing, easy reading, and would make a good supplement to a high school or college course that deals with economic plants or the Amazon, especially with the ecology and economy of the region in the news, and with the tragedy of Chico Mendes a fresh memory. Any person interested in these subjects or neotropical botany, rubber, tropical diseases, human nature, or adventure will find the book a delight. Plan on reading it in one sitting.—George K. Rogers, *Missouri Botanical Garden, P.O. Box 299, St. Louis, Missouri 63166, U.S.A. Present address: Cox Arboretum, 6733 Springboro Pike, Dayton, Ohio 45449, U.S.A.*